

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 14623

EXDIS

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR LE US

SUBJ: LEBANESE-US RELATIONS

REF: BEIRUT 14607

1. I WAS CALLED TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THIS MORNING, DEC 7, BY ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL ANTOINE FATTAL. FONMIN TAKLA JOINED US SHORTLY AFTER MY ARRIVAL AND DID MOST OF THE TALKING.

2. AS A FRIEND OF THE US AND AS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF AMB GODLEY, HE WANTED TO MAKE PERSONAL SUGGESTION THAT AMB GODLEY DELAY HIS RETURN TO LEBANON UNTIL AFTER PRES FRANGIEH'S NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE AMB COULD, OF COURSE, RETURN AT ANY TIME HE WANTED BUT IN THE INTEREST OF RESOLVING THE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES OVER PRES FRANGIEH'S RECEPTION HE FELT IT WOULD BE BETTER IF AMB GODLEY RETURNED EARLY IN JANUARY THAN NOW. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE ISSUE WAS NOT WITH THE GOVT WHICH WAS QUITE PREPARED TO ACCEPT US APOLOGIES AND END THE MATTER AS OF NOW. THE ISSUE WAS THE SENSIBILITIES OF PRES FRANGIEH WHICH MADE IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO HANDLE. HE MENTIONED THAT THE PRES HAD CALMED DOWN CONSIDERABLY. HE WAS AFRAID, HOWEVER, THAT IF THE AMB RETURNED AT THIS POINT THE WHOLE ISSUE WOULD AGAIN COME TO THE FOREFRONT IN FRANGIEH'S MIND AND ANOTHER INCIDENT WOULD BE REPEATED AT THE JAN 1 RECEPTION. IF, HOWEVER, THE

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AMB WAS WILLING TO RETURN IN EARLY JAN, HE THOUGHT

THAT THE INTERVENING PERIOD IN WHICH THE PRES WOULD BE CONCENTRATING ON OTHER PROBLEMS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL FOR A FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. THE FONMIN STATED THAT HE (TAKLA) WOULD RECEIVE AMB GODLEY THE NEXT DAY AFTER HIS ARRIVAL AND WOULD HOPE THAT IN A REASONABLE TIME THEREAFTER HE PERSONALLY WOULD TAKE THE AMB TO HAVE A COFFEE WITH PRES FRANGIEH. HE REITERATED HIS PREVIOUS ASSURANCES THAT, OF COURSE, THE AMB WOULD NOW AND WOULD THEN BE RECEIVED BY OTHER MINISTERS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS MAKING A PERSONAL SUGGESTION WHICH SHOULD IN NO WAY BE CONSTRUED AS AN OFFICIAL REQUEST.

3. I REPLIED THAT THE PRES WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO HAD FEELINGS. THE DEPT OF STATE CONSIDERED THAT THE USG HAD DONE EVERYTHING THAT COULD REASONABLY BE EXPECTED OF A GOVT TO MAKE AMENDS AND THEREFORE WAS NOT HAPPY AT PRESIDENT'S PERSISTENCE KEEPING PROBLEM ALIVE. I SAID IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO ME IN PRESENTING HIS SUGGESTION IF I COULD ASSURE THE DEPT THAT FRANGIEH WOULD RECEIVE AMB GODLY IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RETURN. TAKLA REPLIED THAT HE COULD NOT GIVE THAT ASSURANCE, BUT THAT HE WAS REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT, IF GODLEY REMAINED AWAY FOR THE PERIOD HE HAD SUGGESTED, HE COULD ARRANGE A MEETING IN A REASONABLE TIME AFTER THE AMB'S RETURN. I THEN ASKED HIM IF HE COULD ASSURE THAT I WOULD BE RECEIVED BY THE PRES AT THE RECEPTION. HE REPLIED THAT HE COULD GUARANTEE THAT SOMEONE FROM THE EMBASSY WOULD BE RECEIVED. I SAID THAT WAS NOT GOOD ENOUGH AS I WAS CERTAIN THAT IF THE PRES REFUSED TO SEE ME THE DEPT WOULD NOT AGREE TO ANY OTHER EMBASSYREP ATTENDING THE RECEPTION. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD MAKE INQUIRIES AND INFORM ME OF THE RESULTS IN THE NEXT TWO OR THREEDAYS. I THEN ASKED HIM IF THE PRES HAD ANYTHING AGAINST ME PERSONALLY. HE REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT. I TOLD HIM THAT, IF THE DEPT ACCEPTED THE PROPOSAL AND I COULD GIVE NO UNDERTAKING THAT IT WOULD, BOTH THE DEPT AND THE EMBASSY WOULD PRESUMABLY WANT TO MAKE A STATEMENT EXPLAINING, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT AMB GODLEY WAS REMAINING IN THE STATES ON LEAVE FOR THE CHRISTMAS

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HOLIDAYS AND WOULD BE RETURNING TO BEIRUT SOMETIME IN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS IN JANUARY. HE SAID OBVIOUSLY IT WAS OUR RIGHT TO MAKE SUCH A STATEMENT BUT HE HOPED THAT WE WOULD NOT MENTION ANYTHING CONCERNING THE PRES IN THE STATEMENT.

4. I THEN TOLD HIM I WOULD PRESENT HIS SUGGESTION TO THE DEPT. HE THANKED ME AND SAID HE HOPED THAT HE WOULD RECEIVE

THE DRAFT LETTER THAT WE HAD DISCUSSED
FAIRLY SOON. I TOLD HIM THAT THE SECRETARY HAD BEEN
EXTREMELY BUSY IN TESTIFYING BEFORE CONGRESS ON THE
TRADE BILL, ETC., AND HAD NOT HAD A CHANCE TO REVIEW
THE PROJECT. I TOLD HIM THAT I DID NOT KNOW
WHETHER THE SECRETARY WOULD APPROVE IT OR NOT.

5. COMMENT: IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE HAVE TWO ALTERNATIVES.
AMB GODLEY COULD RETURN BEFORE CHRISTMAS AND LET THE
PRES STEW IN HIS OWN JUICE. THIS WOULD HAVE THE
ADVANTAGE OF KILLING ANY SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER
HE WAS RETURNING OR NOW BUT I AM AFRAID IT WOULD NOT
EASE THE PROBLEM WITH FRANGIEH.

6. THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE IS TO ACCEPT TAKLA'S
PROPOSAL. AS THE AMB AND I HAVE BOTH MENTIONED IN
CABLES, WE ARE DEALING WITH AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT
MAN AND THE LEBANESE FOREIGN OFFICE WOULD BE THE FIRST
TO AGREE. I THINK A FURTHER PERIOD FOR LETTING THE
ISSUE DIE IN FRANGIEH'S MIND COULD BE HELPFUL. I
DO FEEL STRONGLY, HOWEVER, THAT IF WE ACCEPT TAKLA'S
SUGGESTION, WE MUST QUICKLY MAKE A STATEMENT PERHAPS
PERFERABLY IN RESPONSE TO AN INSPIRED QUESTION THAT
AMB GODLEY IS REMAINING IN THE STATES (OR ABROAD) ON LEAVE FOR
THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS AND WILL RETURN TO LEBANON SOMETIME
IN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF JANUARY. I ALSO THINK
WE SHOULD INSIST THAT IF THE AMB DOES NOT RETURN TILL
AFTER THE RECEPTION THAT EITHER I OR NO ONE ATTENDS.

7. WHAT TAKLA IS REALLY TELLING US IS THAT, IN HIS
PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT, JUST AS THERE IS STRONG POSSIBILITY
THAT AMB'S DELAYING HIS RETURN UNTIL FIRST OF
NEXT YEAR WOULD PERMIT DENOUEMENT OF PROBLEM, SO HIS
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RETURN PRIOR TO JAN 1 RECEPTION WILL EXACERBATE
MATTER IN PRESIDENT'S MIND AND RESULT IN FURTHER
SNUB OF AMB. I WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR DEPT'S RESPONSE TO
TAKLA ASAP.
HOUGHTON

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